



ESSEX PLANNING COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING

Thursday, January 9, 2020
7:30 p.m.
Essex Town Hall – Meeting Room A

DRAFT MINUTES

1. Call to Order and Seating of Members

Chairman Alan Kerr called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. In attendance for the meeting were Members George Sexton and Gary Riggio. Seated for Member Erin Bogan was Alternate Hope Proctor. Also in attendance was Planner John Guszowski.

2. Approval of Minutes – December 12, 2019 Regular Meeting

Motion to approve minutes of December 12, 2019 by Hope Proctor, seconded by George Sexton. Motion carried unanimously.

3. New Business

a. UConn Student Presentation on Essex Village Parking/Circulation

Chairman Kerr recognized EDC Chair Janet Peckinpaugh to introduce the students from UConn who have been working with the Town for two years to examine possibilities for re-envisioning traffic, parking and circulation in the village areas. She discussed how students Samantha Lee and Sean Driscoll, along with their fellow students, promoted the idea of “tactical urbanism” as a low-stakes, no-construction way to demonstrate what more long-term restructuring might look like. She, along with ED Coordinator Susan Malan, asked that the Planning Commission join with Economic Development to participate in a public information effort in advance of any of the temporary realignment taking place. Susan Malan talked about how the project arose out of complaints that there was not properly available in Essex Village, but that the problem was more about organization. The students proposed angled parking in a “chicane” alignment in a way that would improve the traffic and pedestrian environment, with no net loss of parking spots.

Hope Proctor clarified the parking alignment and asked questions about the different roadway textures, as well as about long-term landscaping at the traffic circle at the top of Main Street. She

also asked how the chicane parking would accommodate large boats on trailers, and the students stated that the widths were appropriate, but they would have to investigate the turning movements. Chairman Kerr stated that the Planning Commission was strongly in favor of supporting a public information event. Janet Peckinpugh suggested that they would like to have the meeting in February, and the Commission discussed approaches to promoting the event. Should the town commissions approve of the concept, the project would be rolled out in the spring and be in place for about four weeks. Chairman Kerr requested that John Guskowski coordinate with EDC on behalf of the Planning Commission to plan the public information meeting.

b. Discussion with Bob Doane on River Road Sidewalk Concept

Town consulting engineer Bob Doane of Doane Engineering discussed that he had been tasked by the Selectmen to lay out a preliminary plan for sidewalks on River Road between Dennison Road/North Main Street and Heritage Cove. He said that because of the former ownership of the Road by the State, there was generally enough right-of-way, but that space wasn't uniformly useful. One of the problematic "choke points" was just past Book Hill to the first curve southerly of that. He sought input from the Commission about their goals for pavement width and sidewalk width, particularly given the grading, the large sycamore tree, and Falls River banks in the study area. He suggested that with 11' travel lanes, there should be sufficient outer width to accommodate a 4-5' sidewalk without pinching the traffic, but would limit a shoulder for bicycles. Because of the recent conditions assessment of the River Road bridge, some of this narrow area could be solved by a widening of the bridge when it was replaced.

Hope Proctor asked about a crosswalk at Book Hill, which Bob Doane explained was difficult because of the grading of the houses on the side banks. She asked about the status of the bridge, and John Guskowski discussed the difference between the two bridge funding programs and how the classification of River Road as an Urban Collector Road affects its eligibility. His engineering colleagues at CME are currently preparing a cost estimate for the replacement of the River Road so the Town can determine how it would like to proceed on the funding path.

Bob Doane discussed the alignment concerns and some of the neighbor and natural resource sensitivity, and how the Book Hill intersection would require some vertical realignment to improve the grading and approach, as well as not overly interfere with existing landscaping while maintaining a 26' pavement width and a less than 2:1 slope on the adjacent bank. Hope Proctor discussed the difference between work in the right-of-way and the required taking. Bob Doane stated that there would be sensitivity to existing plantings, stone walls, and other features in the right-of-way that would be required by the project. Gary Riggio asked about cost, and Bob Doane stated that the cost would exceed the \$500,000 limit of a STEAP grant, and John Guskowski noted the other funding programs that could be brought into use.

Bob Doane asked about the Commission's level of comfort with a narrower pavement width of 24' at the tighter choke points and balance the needs of bicyclists, walkers, and cars. The Commission discussed bike lanes and how bicycles would navigate the narrow areas. Bob Doane stated that full pedestrian connectivity was the key priority. He will send a digital version of the preliminary sidewalk plans to the Commission. Some members of the public asked questions about the sidewalk plans and alternatives. Jim O'Brien, on behalf of the residents of Heritage Cove, expressed a great deal of support for the idea of extending the sidewalks and requested to be kept closely apprised about the development of plans. First Selectman Needleman stated that the safety of the engineering designs was the critical element and the Town would work to get that correct, but the funding would be the key.

c. Discussion with First Selectman on Sidewalks and Commissions

Chairman Kerr welcomed First Selectman Norm Needleman to discuss some of his priorities for 2020. First Selectman Needleman noted that he made his comments on the sidewalks during Bob Doane's presentation, but reiterated that doing the project carefully and correctly was absolutely essential. There was a general discussion about the DOT bridge inspections and replacement timeframes.

First Selectman Needleman then began to discuss proposed cleanup of Commissions, including folding the Water Pollution Control Authority back into the purview of the Board of Selectmen because the Town has a full-time Director of Health as well as the absence of a DEEP consent order. He also began to discuss the value of merging the Planning and Zoning Commissions, including the relative lack of activity for the Planning Commission and the general reluctance of the Zoning Commission to implement the PoCD recommendations. Hope Proctor expressed some concern about the length of meetings and the ability of the combined Commission to consider big-picture ideas. First Selectman Needleman discussed the efficiencies of a combined Commission that would need to be paired with sufficient staffing. John Guszkowski noted that regulatory change would also provide the opportunity to take a great deal of work off of the Commission's agenda and charge staff with much more application review. Hope Proctor asked about process and nominations on the Commission, which would be managed by the ultimate ordinance and the Board of Selectman processes. First Selectman Needleman discussed the history of the Commissions and the authorities of the Zoning Commission that had created unnecessarily onerous regulations and permitting procedures. He suggested that the Selectmen would hold hearings on this matter, with an eye on potential transition at the end of the year.

4. Old Business

a. PoCD Implementation

i. Route 9 Gateway Development Node – Concepts and Map

John Guszkowski presented the preliminary map and the initial considerations. Hope Proctor stated that uses that demand large parking fields that would be visibly disruptive should be avoided, and larger movie theaters might create that. The Commission discussed the value of the Witch Hazel complex and the Steam Train as architectural templates for design. They also agreed that an establishment of a visual "gateway" should be pursued, and John Guszkowski discussed the potential of grant funds to do branding and signage. Chairman Kerr asked that John Guszkowski take the Commission suggestions and begin to roll them into a draft regulation.

ii. Bokum and Ivoryton Development Nodes – Next Steps

John Guszkowski noted that he would be meeting with ZEO Joe Budrow and Zoning Chairman Larry Shipman to discuss the full Zoning Regulation draft and timing of public hearings in the late winter or early spring, at which time the proposed Node Overlays would be considered.

5. **Report of Committees and Officers**

a. **Report from RiverCOG Representative**

Chairman Kerr stated that the RiverCOG meeting had been cancelled, and that Sandra Childress had taken over as the Town's representative.

b. **Report from Economic Development Commission Representative**

George Sexton reported on several recent developments, including: a new design/decoration shop opened on Main Street; the Ivoryton Tavern had been sold and was under the management of the former day-shift supervisor; Swanky's in Centerbrook was open; 11 Main Street in Essex was a new jewelry retail store; Black Jack's restaurant (former Wright's) was open; 3 Main Street, Centerbrook was a planned ice cream shop; and the UConn student project was a major successful initiative of the EDC.

c. **Planner's Report**

John Guskowski reported on several matters: the River Road bridge conditions assessment and the question of replacement including potential re-classification of Book Hill and River Roads; the sale of CME Associates to CHA Consulting and the anticipation that service to the Town would not be affected; and the process of updating the Town's Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan. He also noted that he had neglected to propose a FY 2020-2021 Planning Commission budget but suggested that the budget could be level-funded, with minor details to be worked out between the planner and Chairman.

Motion to support a level budget for the Planning Commission for FY 2020-2021, with minor details to be worked out between the Chairman and Consulting Planner by Gary Riggio, **seconded** by Hope Sexton. **Motion carried unanimously.**

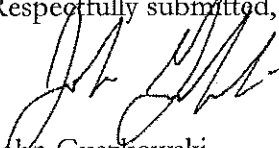
6. **Correspondence & Invoices**

There were no items of correspondence or invoices.

7. **Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn by Hope Proctor, **seconded** by George Sexton. **Motion carried unanimously.** Meeting was adjourned at 9:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


John Guskowski
Consulting Town Planner

RECEIVED FOR RECORD
01/10 2020 at 12:33
Janet M. Rozyek
ESSEX, CT -- ASSIST. TOWN CLERK P.M.